

## Meeting Summary

### **ROYAL STREET BUS GARAGE AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

Wednesday, March 12, 2014  
Alexandria City Hall, City Council Chambers

#### Members Present:

Mary Lyman, Committee Chair, Alexandria Planning Commission  
Nancy Appleby, At-Large  
Charlie Cantelli, Alexandria House Homeowners Association  
Jim Doll, Chatham Square Homeowners Association  
Steve Goodman, Garrett's Mill Homeowners Association  
Carolyn Merck, Old Town Civic Association  
Richard Moncure, Portner's Landing Condominium Association  
Janet Powell, Portner's Landing Homeowners Association  
Roy Priest, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority  
Cathy Puskar, NVBIA / NAIOP  
Tom Soapes, North Old Town Independent Citizens' Association  
Daniel Straub, Old Town North Urban Design Advisory Committee  
Ken Wire, NVBIA / NAIOP

#### Members Absent:

Patricia "Velator" Smith, Annie B. Rose House  
Joseph Resende, At-Large

#### City Staff:

Jeff Farner, Department of Planning and Zoning  
Rob Kerns, Department of Planning and Zoning  
Jessica McVary, Department of Planning and Zoning  
Richard Lawrence, Department of Planning and Zoning  
Jon Frederick, Office of Housing

#### Guests:

Rosalyn Doggett, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
Jerry Warren, Alexandria House  
Russell Rosenberger, Madison Homes  
William Sullivan, Alexandria House  
Michael Wenk, Alexandria House  
Christa Watters, NOTICe  
Jesse Lougmaio, Old Town Civic Association  
Brad Lougmaio, Old Town Civic Association

Connie Staudinger, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority  
Howard Wallach, Wallach Realty

### Welcome

Mary Lyman, the Committee Chair, welcomed the Committee and provided an overview of the meeting agenda.

### Draft Design Standards Discussion

Staff presented proposed strategies to achieve comments discussed at the first Committee meeting to initiate dialogue in the development of draft design standards. The following paragraphs summarize the discussion related to the comments and potential strategies.

#### Parking – Location and Access

- Committee members clarified that they did not specify the streets on which curb cuts should occur. They requested that the comment be revised to clarify that curb cuts should be minimized, but the specific streets on which curb cuts should be proposed should not be determined at this time.
- A Committee inquired what was meant by rear load and staff clarified that rear load refers to the vehicular access for townhouse units. In rear load townhouses, the vehicular access is in the back of the house, rather than the front.
- A Committee member inquired if townhouses are always excluded from providing below-grade parking. The Committee discussed that townhouses are not always required to have below-grade parking; in some cases rear garages are provided, but in other cases below-grade parking is provided. Some Committee members noted that cost is often a factor to consider with the provision of below-grade parking for townhomes.

#### Underground Utilities

- The Committee agreed that all utilities on the perimeter of the block should be located below grade.

#### Building Character / Streetscape

- A Committee member recommended that the Committee review the Old Town North Small Area Plan and the Urban Design Guidelines and noted that the strategies proposed by staff are addressed in the approved Plan and Guidelines.
- A Committee member noted that the Old Town North Small Area Plan will likely be updated in the near future, based on the recent City Council action and the Committee is advancing the discussion of the small area plan process.

- A Committee member noted that a potential strategy to achieve variation in the facade could be elevation changes to ensure that the facades are not flat.
- A Committee member also noted that variation in roof forms could be a potential strategy to achieve additional variation in the façade.
- A Committee member noted that it is important for the Committee to ensure that the notion of variations in the facades does not necessarily require different architectural styles within one project. The Committee member indicated that there are different mechanisms to achieve variation in facades while maintaining a unified building identity.

#### Open Space - Connections

- A Committee member inquired if it is appropriate to identify the specific open spaces where monetary contributions could be used to complete future improvements.
- The Committee discussed the potential strategy of providing a 25-foot publicly accessible open space along Wythe Street. Several Committee members noted that 25-feet may not be appropriate here, as this dimension would not be extended beyond this site, could limit the opportunity for additional open space on the site and does not necessarily provide an opportunity for a focal point. A Committee member also inquired if something beyond the green setbacks should be contemplated on the block.
- The Committee indicated that the linkage along Wythe Street to the Potomac River is important, as it provides an opportunity for a focal point along the River.
- A Committee member noted that perhaps some minimum open space requirements should be established, but the location of the open space should be left to the discretion of the developer to provide the opportunity for creativity.
- The Committee discussed the potential strategy related to achieving a balance between public and private open space which discussed the idea of 10-foot setbacks. The Committee recommended revising the strategy to state that the setbacks should be appropriate given the nature of the building related to the adjacent uses. A Committee member also noted that setbacks do not need to be uniform.
- Open space can include both ground-level and above-grade areas. Revise the potential strategy related to private open space to state: in addition to the publicly accessible open space, provide open space for residents (either at- or above-grade). The final location and amount shall be determined through the development review process.

#### Building Scale and Transitions

- Staff presented a series of images to convey examples of building mass and scale, and how mass and scale relates to open space.

- The Committee discussed the possibility of preserving a portion of the existing bus garage structure. While there were several dissenting opinions, there were several Committee members that indicated a future developer should explore preserving a portion of the existing building.
- Rather than preserving the existing structure, explore incorporating architecture which reflects the industrial heritage of the site.
- A Committee member inquired if lower heights on the site must be equal to the height of the adjacent lower-scale buildings, or if an appropriate transition in height could be contemplated.
- The Committee discussed the idea of heights transitioning from higher, on the northern portion of the site, to lower on the southern portion of the site. The Committee also discussed the notion that additional height could be contemplated on the northeastern corner of the site, but several factors must be considered in order to determine the maximum height in this location, including:
  - Construction type may limit the height;
  - The tallest heights must be strategically placed within this portion of the site to maximize daylight and minimize shadows at the pedestrian level.
  - An appropriate streetscape is necessary to ensure a positive pedestrian experience along this portion of the site.
- The Committee appeared to agree to the following, but noted that additional information should be provided at the next meeting to refine this standard: heights shall transition from higher on the northern portion of the site to lower along the southern portion of the site. Heights on the western and southern portion of the site shall be compatible to the height of the existing townhomes. On the north and east, there is an opportunity for additional height, between 50 and 77 feet. Building shoulders could be contemplated on this portion of the site to transition to taller heights while ensuring adequate light at the street level.

#### Public Comment and Discussion

- A member of the public urged the Committee members to review the Old Town North Small Area Plan, reminded the Committee of the site's current zoning and noted that additional height could be considered on the center of the site to prevent the canyons. The member of the public noted that the community would like to see something interesting on the site. Gradation from higher to lower should be observed on the site.
- Two members of the public indicated that the existing zoning and heights are preferred on the site to protect existing views from adjacent buildings.
- A member of the public inquired who would bear the cost of undergrounding utilities surrounding the site. Staff clarified that the developer would be responsible for this cost.

### Land Use Discussion

- Staff provided an overview of the existing land uses within a two-block radius of the bus garage site.
  - South of Pendleton Street is primarily residential, with townhomes and single-family residential.
  - North of Pendleton Street is a more varied mix of uses, including office, multi-family residential buildings and hotels.
  - The location of retail closely aligns with the retail focus areas established in the Plan.
- The Committee discussed what uses are appropriate to consider on the site and whether or not the uses should be specified at this phase.
- Committee members discussed the notion that some uses create challenges with parking.
- Overall, the Committee indicated that the block should be rezoned and should be predominantly residential, but accessory uses could be considered. One Committee member dissented to this recommendation.

### Public Benefits Discussion

- Staff presented public benefits which are typically negotiated through the development special use permit process and then provided examples of additional public benefits which might be negotiated through a rezoning.
- Many Committee members expressed support for a community meeting space within the development as a public benefit.
- A Committee member asked what is meant by additional affordable housing. Staff described what is typically negotiated for affordable housing through the development special use permit process, and then described what is typically negotiated for projects which request a rezoning, additional density, or similar requests.
- Committee members noted that there appears to be a concentration of affordable housing in this area of the City, and additional affordable housing may not be a high priority with the redevelopment of this site.

### Wrap-Up

- Staff to post the meeting presentation to the City website.
- The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 2nd.
- Prior to or during the next meeting, staff will:

- Provide a summary of the Old Town North Small Area Plan and Design Guidelines;
  - Provide additional information related to buildings heights and streetscapes; and
  - Develop draft design standards for the Committee to review.
- During the next meeting, the Committee will also prioritize public benefits.